MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS

POWERFUL FORCES IN A DYNAMIC WORLD

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> Numerous challenges which appear on the global horizon require local responses. The responses are to be sought in cultural policies and regional development.[1]
>
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During the last few years, interest in municipalities and regions has escalated rapidly. Not only are municipalities and regions assuming greater and greater importance in developmental thinking, but also more and more people are looking to municipalities and regions to solve their economic, social, political, environmental and ecological problems.

A concomitant feature of this rapidly-escalating interest in municipalities and regions is the growing interest in municipal and regional development. Whereas the focus of attention during much of the post-war period has been on national and international development, increasingly the focus seems to be shifting to municipalities and regions as the new spawning grounds for innovative and dynamic activity. Clearly this is where the action is and is going to be for some time in the foreseeable future.

Why is this? What vortex of forces is working throughout the world to cause the spotlight to focus directly on municipalities and regions in general and municipal and regional development in particular? More importantly, what role should municipalities and regions assume in development in the future, and what should be the connection between them?

FOCUS ON MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS

It is not difficult to detect some of the forces which are at work throughout the world to cause the spotlight to shine directly on municipalities and regions.

In the first place, an increasing percentage of the world's population is living in municipalities and regions. Whether this is happening because people are being forced to vacate rural areas due to the lack of employment opportunities, or because they are being enticed by the alluring attractions of big city life, the results are everywhere much the same. Municipalities and regions in all parts of the world are dramatically expanding in actual numbers and physical size. As this happens, more and more pressure is exerted on municipalities and regions to provide the economic, social, political, environmental, educational and artistic amenities which are necessary for a healthy and sustained existence.

In the second place, more and more people are realizing that it is the quality of life in municipalities and regions that is the decisive factor in determining overall fulfilment and happiness in life. If the municipalities and regions in which people are living and working lack the basic prerequisites and proper accoutrements of life - decent job possibilities, adequate accommodation, clean water, fresh air, recreational outlets, aesthetic ambience, and health facilities - no amount of industrial growth, technological innovation, or commercial development will make up the difference.

In the third place, rapidly changing world conditions are conspiring to make municipalities and regions one of the most important, if not **the** most important, forms of social organization and human settlement. Whether it is the break up of the national state, the break-down of the nuclear family, the erosion of social values and traditions, the quest for identity, the retracing of political and geographical boundaries, the response to economic uncertainty, the call to "think globally but act locally", the resurfacing of interest in neighbourhoods, or the fascination with bio-regions, more and more people are looking to municipalities and regions to solve their basic problems and satisfy their fundamental needs.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, there is the dialectic reaction that is taking place to globalization, the creation of larger and larger trading blocks, the emergence of powerful economic and political superstates, and the increased concentration of industrial, financial and technological power in fewer and fewer hands. This is manifesting itself in a number of "countervailing movements" aimed at restoring

people's sense of personal and collective identity, political empowerment, community solidarity, and control over decision-making.

THE STATE OF MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How are municipalities and regions responding to these various pressures and challenges? Not particularly well by all accounts.

As more and more people flock to towns, cities and regions in search of work, population densities increase astronomically, causing overcrowding and its attendant problems of overpopulation, congestion, lack of adequate accommodation, and pressure on public utilities and health services. In order to reduce transportation costs and profit from locations close to markets, more and more companies locate in urban surroundings, causing zoning problems to appear and tightening an industrial knot around the centre of most communities. More industries mean more traffic on city streets, since more trucks and vans are required to haul produce. The result is an exponential expansion in vehicular traffic, and with it, major traffic tie-ups, soaring maintenance costs, and complex communications problems. Due to the expansion of all types of vehicular traffic and the urban location of industries, severe pollution problems arise. A layer of soot is added to buildings and a band of smog settles over municipal and regional skies. Water becomes more and more contaminated and mountains of garbage and industrial waste begin to appear. Major pollution, disposal, and processing problems affect the aesthetic state of municipalities and regions, causing it to deteriorate.

Many of the problems arising from this debilitating state of affairs, such as over-utilization of utilities, inadequate waste disposal, water, air and noise pollution, the appearance of ghettos and slums, the loss of safety and security, and the spread of vandalism, violence, and ethnic unrest, cannot be attended to properly because municipalities and regions lack the financial resources, constitutional powers and institutional infrastructures and mechanisms to deal with them properly. Whatever the causes, the consequences are clear. More and more resources are siphoned off in a frantic attempt to cope with this rapidly-deteriorating situation. As a result, fewer and

fewer resources are available to address many of the deeper and more profound cracks and fissures which are opening up in municipal and regional life.

Many of these cracks and fissures have to do with the plummeting social, psychological, human and aesthetic state of municipalities and regions. Lewis Mumford expressed this best when he said:

> When the city ceases to be a symbol of art and order, it acts in a negative fashion: it expresses and helps to make more universal the fact of disintegration.[2]

Many towns, cities and regions are poised dangerously close to this precipice at the present time. Not only are they experiencing enormous difficulties in maintaining the level of public and private amenities which is necessary for a healthy, sustained and meaningful existence, but also they are starting to exude signs of breaking down completely. Walls and barriers are starting to appear in many if not all municipalities and regions as citizens, classes and social groups struggle to escape the adverse effects of industrialization, overpopulation, pollution, violence, and dehumanization. Not only are the social, aesthetic and human bonds which bind municipalities and regions together and give them a sense of community identity beginning to disappear, but also many municipalities and regions are in danger of becoming little more than "callous and impersonal collectivities". As this happens, people progressively withdraw from active participation in public life, thereby increasingly surrendering control over decision-making processes to politicians, developers, planners, and professionals who often have other interests and objectives at heart. With this comes further fragmentation and compartmentalization, and with it, a loss of cohesion, solidarity, continuity, vision, and purpose. It becomes harder and harder to see where municipalities and regions have been in the past, where they are at present, and where they should be headed in the future.

Naturally there are many different views and opinions about how this debilitating situation should be dealt with. For municipal and regional authorities, the solution is to revamp the tax system and constitutional arrangements so that

municipalities and regions have the requisite resources and legislative powers to deal with urban sprawl and the provision of basic necessities and support services. For economists, the solution is to accelerate the pace and tempo of economic growth, thereby improving investment, expenditure and employment opportunities and expanding the size of the economic pie. For developers, the solution is to erect more skyscrapers and high density developments, thereby making better use of the most valuable land.   And for environmentalists, the solution is to control pollution and improve the capacity for ecological renewal and environmental management.

But herein lies the problem. Each group looks at the situation from its own limited and one-dimensional perspective and recommends solutions which relate to its own particular interests. Not only are the needs and interests of others seldom configured into the equation, but also no one is looking at the needs and interests of municipalities and regions **as a whole**. As a result, it is impossible to deal with municipalities and regions as total, integrated entities, rather than as agglomerations of segmented and often highly specialized parts.

MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS AS CULTURES

Where do we commence the search for the clues which are needed to piece together portraits of municipalities and regions as total integrated entities - entities capable of confronting a whole host of economic, political, environmental, social and aesthetic problems, providing a sense of community identity and belonging, engaging people fully in the developmental process, and asserting the dignity and value of municipal and regional life?

Of all the places where clues may be found which are helpful in this regard, it is culture which holds out the most promising possibilities.[3] This is because culture has contained in it the holistic perspective which is needed to see municipalities and regions as complex and comprehensive entities, as well as the practical means to deal with many of the most persistent and profound problems confronting municipal and regional life.

It should be made clear that culture is not being used here in its more traditional and restricted sense as the arts, heritage, communications, or leisure time activity. On the contrary, it is being used in its more contemporary and all-embracing sense as a total worldview which indicates how people visualize the world and act in the world. Looked at in this way, municipalities and regions are cultures or worldviews which reveal how specific groups of people see and interpret the world, organize themselves, conduct their affairs, and position themselves in the world.[4] While little attention has been paid to these worldviews in the past, they are of crucial importance to the future because they relate so fundamentally to what municipalities and regions are really all about.

Given the importance of these worldviews, are there grounds for making them the centrepiece of municipal and regional development in the future? Indeed there are. Rather than putting a cathedral, a public square, a bank, an insurance company, a skyscraper or a smokestack at the centre of municipal or regional life as has so often been the case in the past, surely it would make infinitely greater sense to make the municipality's or region's worldview or statement of itself the principal focal point or centrepiece of municipal and regional activity in the future. In this way, everyone could take collective pride in, and accept full responsibility for, the statement that the municipality or region was making to itself as well as to the rest of the world.

It is clear from this that culture occupies a very different kind of place in municipal and regional development than economics, politics, industry, the environment, or social affairs. Rather than being just another ingredient in municipal and regional development, culture is the cement which binds all the other ingredients together to form a coherent and comprehensive whole. It is the substance, so to speak, which provides cohesion, continuity, identity, solidarity, and most importantly of all, **pride of place**. Without this, municipalities and regions will never extricate themselves from the morass of the present and cross over the threshold to a much more exhilarating future.

If culture should act as the cornerstone for municipal and regional development in the future, it is appropriate to ask how this can best be accomplished in

fact. Surely it is best accomplished by devising the methodological tools and techniques which are necessary to treat municipalities and regions as cultures in their own right - cultures which encompass **all** aspects and dimensions of municipal and regional life.

The culturescape is one such methodological tool.[5] As a device for engaging citizens actively in the development process, it represents a useful technique for activating and assembling a municipality's or region's collective statement or portrait of itself.

THE CULTURESCAPE PROCESS

There is nothing mysterious about a landscape. A landscape is a visual exposition of the natural and human-made sights of an environment. It exposes the way in which the eye surveys an environment, sometimes stopping to focus on distinctive features, often roving rapidly over features it takes for granted, but always snapping mental pictures and making selections and evaluations as it moves.

Nor is there anything mysterious about a soundscape. A soundscape is the ear's answer to the eye. It is an aural exposition of the different sounds of an environment.[6] It reveals the way in which the human ear samples natural, mechanical and human sounds, opening wide to sounds which are pleasant and soothing, and closing off to sounds which are unsettling and abrasive.

It follows from this that a culturescape is an exposition of all the different cultural features of an environment - natural, historical, sensorial, social, economic, political, aesthetic and human.[7] It is an environment assaulted by all the human faculties in concert, an explorer's curiosity set loose on the infinite panorama of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, institutions, activities and events encountered in everyday life.

Landscapes and soundscapes cut down into environments. They are discrete notions, designed to look at municipalities and regions through the vertical

lenses of specialization. As such, they are structured to explore similar facets and manifestations of cultural life. In contrast, culturescapes cut across environments. They are integrative, horizontal notions, designed to reveal the infinite and inter-related nature of many diverse facets of cultural life. They are structured to bring things together, not set things apart.

Respecting citizens for the valuable contributions they can make to municipal and regional development is the key to the culturescape process. Through respect for citizens' contributions, more and more people will be anxious to participate in the transformation of municipal and regional cultural life.

Every citizen has something valuable to contribute to the culturescape process. For some, it may be itineraries of daily or weekly events, or imprints of the cultural patterns they impose on local and regional surroundings. For others, it may be impressions of community or regional likes and dislikes. For still others, it may be actual objects, old photographs, artifacts, tapes, oral histories, antiques, historical records, or other memorabilia of municipal or regional interest.

As this information starts to accumulate, it can be classified, codified, and orchestrated in different ways to produce different results. For example, it can be used to prepare profiles of the different sectors of cultural activity - economic, social, educational, political, environmental, aesthetic and human. Or it can be used to prepare inventories, maps, tours, or probes into specific cultural features. Or it might be used to assemble citizens' impressions of the aesthetic state of their municipalities and regions, or the things they like most and least about municipal and regional cultural life. It all depends on the task at hand, as well as the nature of the information desired and collected.

Obviously many of these activities are already being undertaken in municipalities and regions throughout the world under different names. By collecting, classifying, conserving and displaying artifacts of local historical interest, museums, art galleries and libraries are engaged in one aspect of this activity. By taping and transcribing observations and oral histories of long-time residents, universities and

community colleges are engaged in another aspect of this activity. And by providing information about walking tours and historic sites, tourist and visitor centres are engaged in yet another aspect of this activity. The problem is that this information exists in so many diverse locations, and is collected for so many different purposes, that it does not provide a comprehensive and compelling portrait of municipal or regional cultural life. Thus the culturescape process becomes a vehicle for putting the shattered mirror of municipalities and regions back together again.

If the culturescape process is to fulfil this function effectively, it is clear that what is needed more than anything else are municipal and regional centres to which citizens can bring their contributions, from which they can acquire information about their municipalities and regions as dynamic and comprehensive cultural entities, and through which they can become actively involved in the future planning and development of their communities. Such centres should be concerned with developing the models, replicas, and displays which are needed to illustrate how proposed and actual changes will affect the sensory, aesthetic, human, social, political, economic and environmental state of municipalities and regions. For only when this happens will citizens have the opportunity to assess the impact of different kinds of decisions on the cultural fabric of the community, as well as work alongside professionals in bringing about needed community cultural change. The result will be municipalities and regions which are shaped less by the dictates and desires of special interest groups and more by the interests of the community as a whole.

What facilities, equipment, and skills are needed in these "culturescape centres" to realize these objectives? Obviously this will vary from municipality to municipality, region to region depending on a variety of factors: the extent of citizen participation; the nature of people's contributions; the availability of suitable space; the level of public commitment; and the availability of the requisite expertise.

A large, accessible, comfortable and informal space, capable of hanging billboards and maps, displaying models, generating and recording feedback, storing memorabilia and artifacts, and dispensing information, would be ideal for such purposes. This space would need to be complemented by people who possess

capabilities in such areas as photography, cartography, documentation, exhibition, visual and aural representation, and especially aesthetic evaluation. Local artists, craftspeople, librarians, historians, photographers, audio-visual specialists, geographers and curators would all be very suitable in this regard.

Ideally all this activity should be housed in a separate facility located at or near the centre of the municipality or region. A deserted factory, an old warehouse, an abandoned office building, a dilapidated railroad station, or a community hall would all make perfect premises in this regard. Failing this, a museum, a library, an arts centre, or a cultural centre might serve this purpose. However, it should be borne in mind that while all these institutions possess some of the resources, facilities and skills which are needed to engage in culturescape activity, the large majority of them are serving very different functions at present. Their function is not to build or house the municipality's or region's mirror image or statement of itself, but rather to present artistic works of the highest standards or greatest historical and contemporary significance to the public.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is clear from the foregoing that some fundamental changes would be required in municipal and regional administration if culture was to form the backbone of municipal and regional development and the culturescape process was to become the centrepiece or principal focal point of municipal and regional activity.

It is impossible to raise issues as fundamental as these without raising the related issue of the respective roles and responsibilities of municipal and regional governments, particularly as they pertain to culture. Issues such as these are best seen in context rather than in isolation.

There can be little doubt that determination of the respective roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government for culture constitutes one of the most difficult challenges in the political and cultural fields today. Why is this? Surely it is because people have deep and profound cultural needs at every level of activity: personal, community, municipal, regional, national, and international. As a result, it is

not advisable to assign responsibility over culture to a single level of government, as political authorities in Canada discovered recently when they attempted to make culture the preserve of the provincial governments.

The important question here is obviously not which level of government should have responsibility over culture, but rather what are the respective roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government for culture? Failure to address this question and deal with its consequences immediately opens the doors to the political manipulation of culture.

While this subject cries out for a great deal more thought, discussion and debate, common sense would suggest that each level of government should look after its own cultural needs and the cultural needs of its constituency. This would mean that municipal governments would be responsible for all forms of cultural activity at the grass roots or local level. Regional governments would be responsible for all forms of regional cultural activity, including all forms of inter-municipal exchange and cooperation, and national governments would be responsible for all forms of national cultural activity, or the cultural development of societies **as a whole**. Presumably this would include all forms of inter-regional cooperation and exchange, as well as all forms of international cultural relations. While this general "rule of thumb" is far removed from the present situation, it might be an objective worth pursuing in the future.

Given the rapidly-escalating importance of municipalities and municipal cultural needs, it would be foolhardy to underestimate the role that municipal governments should play in this area. Hence the irony of the present situation. At the very time when cultural development is needed most of all at the municipal level, municipal governments are in the worst possible position to respond. Not only do they lack the constitutional prerogatives, taxation powers and fiscal resources to address the cultural needs of their citizens, but also they lack the institutional structures, mechanisms and procedures which are needed to deal with these requirements.

How should municipal governments respond to this situation? Firstly, they should dramatically increase their funding for cultural development, largely by

reallocating funds from areas of lesser to greater need. Secondly, they should develop plans, programs, policies, and practices which broaden and deepen citizen participation in cultural life. Thirdly, they should train cultural animators who are skilled in acting as catalysts for community cultural change. And finally, they should commission creative people like artists to become actively involved in elevating and enriching all aspects of local cultural life.

With these commitments should come corresponding improvements in the institutional structures which are established to administer cultural development. As matters stand at present, many municipalities have no specific administrative structures for culture at all, or they have departments of parks and recreation where culture is tacked on as an afterthought. These structures are totally inadequate to meet the challenges and the needs. Not only do they lack the financial and human resources to do the job properly, but also they marginalize culture and make it an insignificant ingredient in the total scheme of things.

This situation must change. If municipal governments are to play a responsible and constructive role in cultural development in the future, they must set up administrative structures which are equal to the challenge. In other words, they must set up the departments of cultural affairs, community cultural councils and the like and endow them with sufficient funds, personnel, and resources to do the job properly. For only in this way will they send out a message to citizens, other levels of government, corporations, foundations, and community groups that they are prepared to play a leadership role in the cultural field.

If municipal governments should play a leadership role in cultural matters, what is the appropriate role for regional governments? How should they position themselves in the cultural field, and what responsibilities should they assume?

Given the dynamic changes which are taking place everywhere in the world, regional governments have a responsibility to help municipalities take control of their own cultural destiny by developing the cultural policies and practices which are needed to address the nature, intimacy, uniqueness, and centrality of municipal cultural

life.   But this is clearly a backup role.   More fundamentally, regional governments should be actively involved in promoting inter-municipal cultural exchanges and cooperation, facilitating links between municipal, regional, national and international authorities,[8] broadening and deepening the sense of regional cultural identity, and confronting the dangers of excessive parochialism.   These latter two functions are particularly important in view of the need for cultural identity and belonging on the one hand and the perpetual risk of xenophobia, ethnic conflict and racial unrest on the other hand.

In conclusion, what can be said about the development of municipalities and regions and the relationship between them?   This depends largely on the pressures which are exerted on municipalities and regions, as well as the changing nature of concepts like "culture" and "development".   In the past, we have tended to view municipalities and regions exclusively in economic terms.   One consequence of this has been to treat culture as an addendum to the economy.   For the future, it may be more appropriate to view municipalities and regions as cultures and works of art.[9] This would make it possible to focus attention on all the qualitative and quantitative improvements which are required to enhance and elevate municipal and regional cultural life.   Regardless of whether municipalities and regions are seen as economies or cultures, however, one thing is clear.   Without awarding a higher priority to cultural development, citizen participation in the process and cultivation of pride of place, municipalities and regions will never be able to respond to the complex challenges and demands which are being imposed on them.

ENDNOTES

1.   Biserka Cvjeticanin. "Cultural Change: Global Challenge and Regional Response". Razvoj Development International. Vol. VI. No. 2-. July-December 1991. Institute for Development and International Relations. Zagreb. p. 323.

2.   Lewis Mumford. The Culture of Cities. Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. New York. 1938. p.6.

3.   D. Paul Schafer. Culture: A Field of Theory and Practice in Its Own Right. World Culture Project. Markham. 1992.

4.   D. Paul Schafer. The Cosmological Conception of Culture: Canadian Culture Used as a Case Study for Illustrative Purposes. World Culture Project. Markham. 1992.

5.   The culturescape process was developed for Ontario's Ministry of Culture and Recreation (now the Ministry of Culture and Communications) in 1975 and 1976. Designed to take a cultural approach to community development, it involved intensive probes into four communities in Ontario and lead to the publication of Explorations in Culturescape: A Cultural Approach to Community Development. Ministry of Culture and Recreation. Government of Ontario. Toronto. 1976.

6.   R. Murray Schafer. The Tuning of the World: A Pioneering Exploration into the Past History and Present State of the Most Neglected Aspect of our Environment: The Soundscape. McClelland and Stewart and Alfred A. Knopf. Toronto and New York. 1977.

7.   D. Paul Schafer. "The Culturescape: Self-Awareness of Communities". CULTURES. Vol. V. No. 1. (Culture and Community). The Unesco Press and La Baconnière. Unesco. Paris. 1978.

8.   See, for example, Michel Bassard. Culture et régions d'Europe. Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes. Lausanne. 1990, and Biserka Cvjeticanin. "Cultural Change: Global Challenge and Regional Response."
op. cit. pp. 324-325.

9.   D. Paul Schafer. Community Cultural Development. World Culture Project. Markham. 1992.